CHAPTER VII

CHINA UNDER THE RULE OF THE MONGOLS (A.D. 1279-1368)

INTRODUCTORY

WHEN the commander of the remnant of the Sung forces, in defiant despair, terminated the hopeless struggle against the Mongols by throwing himself and the boy Emperor into the sea, it was not only a dynasty hut an era which had come to an end. China was now a part of the Mongol Empire and was ruled by foreigners. It was too huge to be absorbed into any alien civilization, and the Mongols, far from forcing their own crude culture on the Middle Kingdom, adopted much of that of their subjects. Gone, however, was the Sung court which, with all its political weaknesses and mistakes, had done so much to foster literature and art. Immigrants of many different races and cultures shared in the administration of the country. The rich flowering of culture under the Sung faded, and although here and there a few hardy survivors of its luxuriant blooming continued the older traditions, they were a dwindling remnant.

For some reason, contacts with foreigners under the Mongols did not stimulate the Chinese genius to any new life at all comparable with that which had followed the introduction of Buddhism. Some few significant and widely influential developments there were, as we shall see—in the drama and in the writing of novels, for instance—and Moslems now became a factor in Chinese life with which the realm had henceforth to reckon. However, very few new intellectual, social, or

religious move-
ments which profoundly affected the entire life of the people
entered from the outside world, and none which equalled those of
the centuries of disunion before the T'ang. When the Mongols
were at last expelled and the Empire was once more under a native
dynasty, culturally the Chinese tended to fall back upon the
heritage of their pre-Mongol past, and, while in some respects